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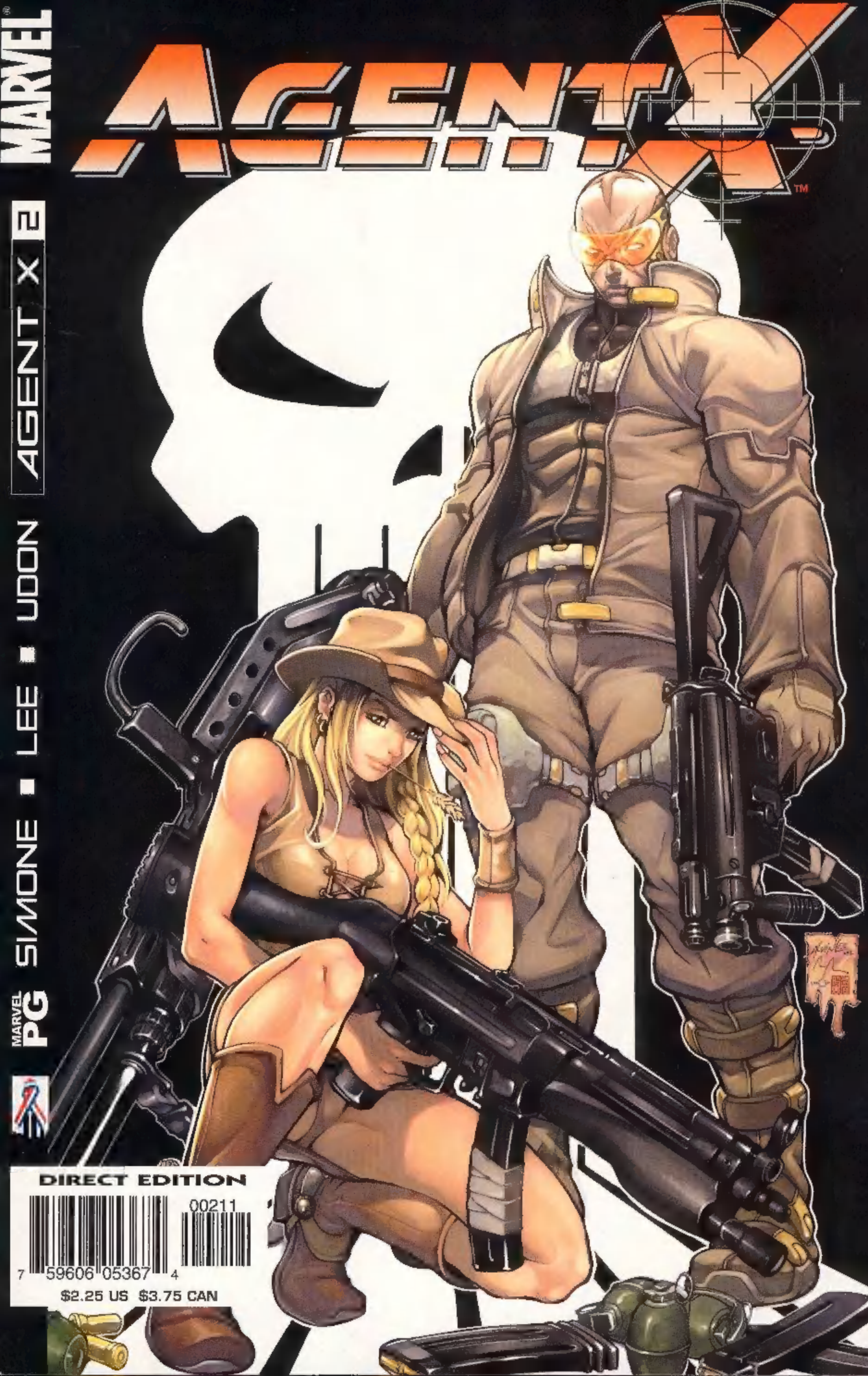
MARVEL®

AGENT X™

AGENT X #2

UDON ■ LEE ■ SIMONE ■

MARVEL PG



DIRECT EDITION

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$2.25 US $3.75 CAN

Previously in:

AGENT X

Agent X

Sandi

Taskmaster

Outlaw

The man now known as Agent X arrived hungry, helpless and drooling at former secretary Sandi Brandenberg's doorstep, begging for her help. Sandi, with a penchant for taking in mangy strays and seeing a resemblance to an old friend in the strange man, agreed to help him start a new life and career. Together they founded the mercenary agency: Agency X.

Choosing the name Alex Hayden, our hero began training immediately. Sandi enlisted the help of fellow mercenaries Taskmaster and Outlaw to train Hayden. Taskmaster took an immediate dislike to Hayden after seeing the same resemblance to Sandi's old friend, whom he also despised and considered a rival. After several bloody training sessions, which included multiple stabbings courtesy of the Taskmaster, Hayden finished his training and accepted his first mission: Gathering rogue carnival animals.

The animals were released to threaten and intimidate the carnival owner, who refused to sell his property to a mysterious Japanese criminal organization known as the Four Winds. Hayden successfully gathered the animals and, to send an intimidating message of his own, crashed an elephant into the lobby of the building where the head of the Four Winds, Higashi, resided.

Having successfully completed his first job, Hayden is thrilled to find his payment is the deed to his client's abandoned carnival. If only everyone else was as thrilled...

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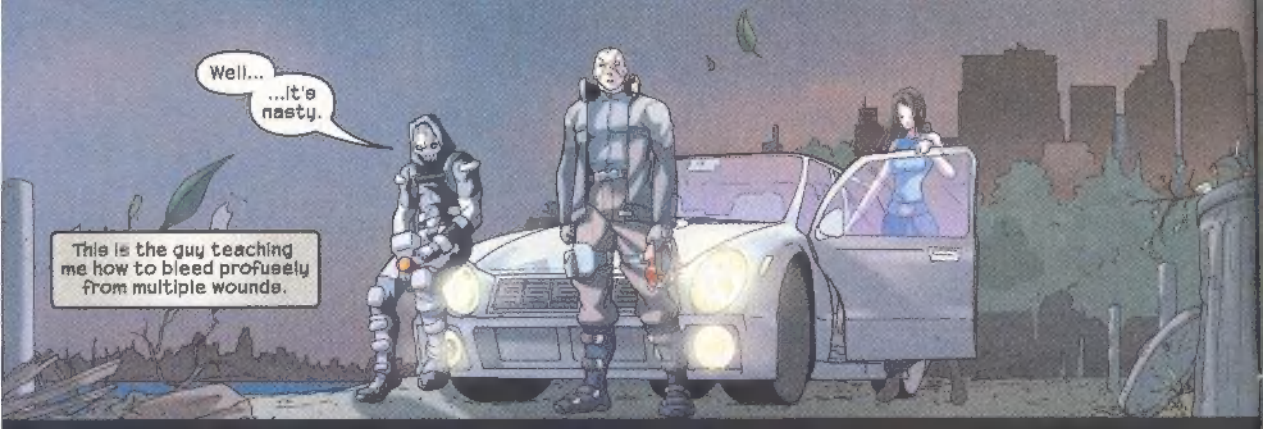
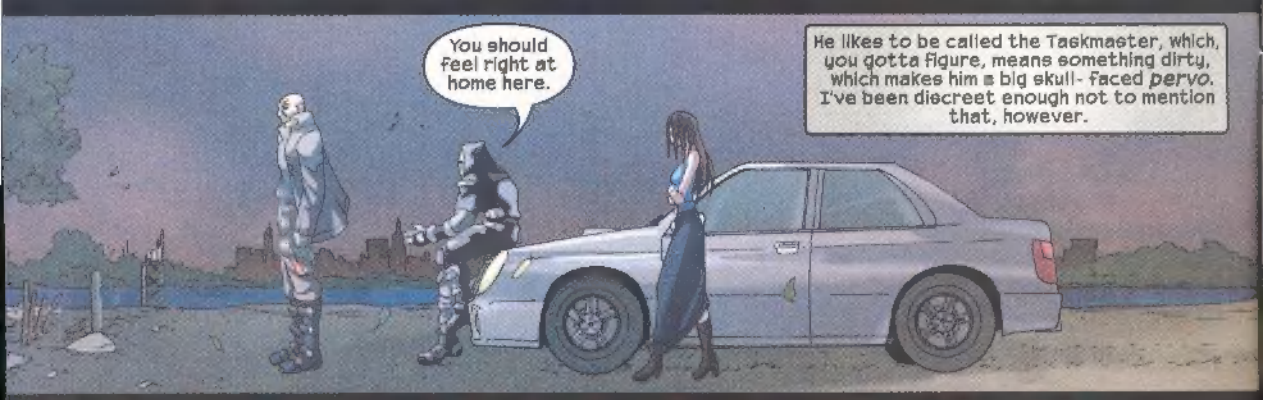
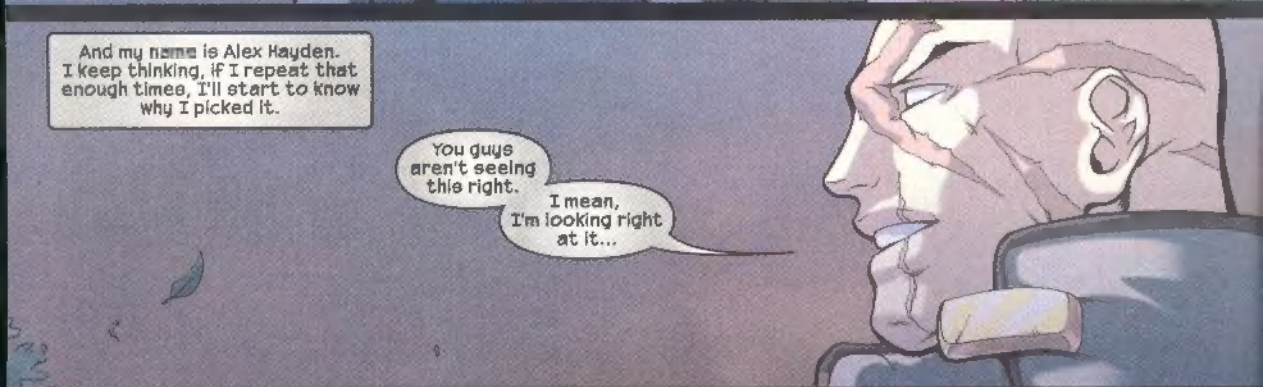



You should feel right at home here.
He likes to be called the Taskmaster, which, you gotta figure, means something dirty, which makes him a big skull-faced *pervo*. I've been discreet enough not to mention that, however.

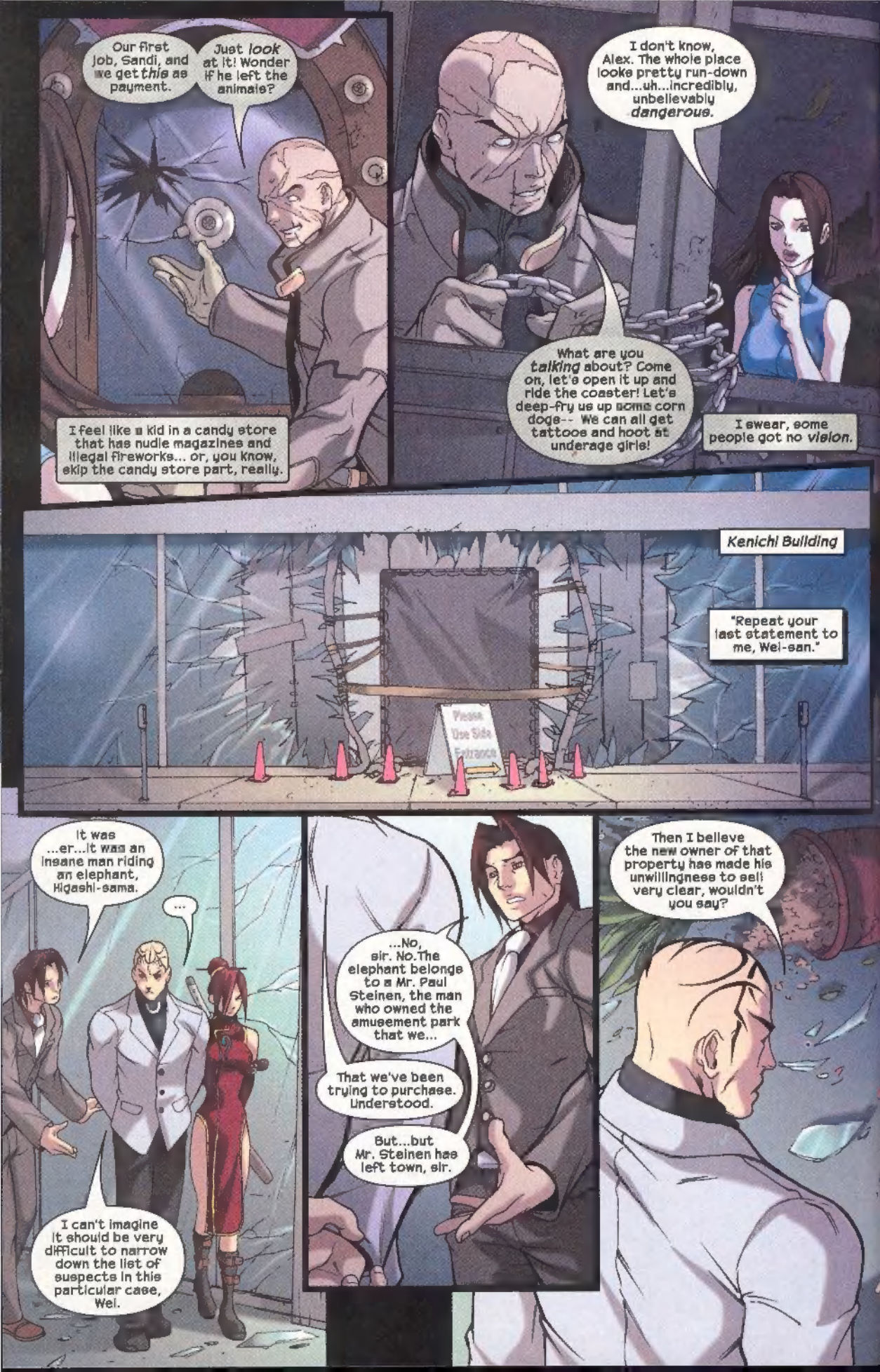
DEAD MAN'S SWITCH PART 2

Story by	Art by	UDON Chief	Letters by	Assisted by	Edited by	Chief	President
Gail Simone	UDON with *Alvin Lee, Eric Vedder, Rob Ross, Calvin Lo, Arnold Tsang, Andrew Hou, TheRealTI & Omar Dogan*	*Erik Ko*	*Dave Sharpe*	*Lynne Yoshii*	*Andrew Lis*	*Joe Quesada*	*Bill Jemas*

This whole area used to be really pretty. We'd take the train out here when I was little.
Now it looks like a poverty bomb exploded.
This is my new business partner, Sandi Brandenberg. She believes in me, but don't judge her by that.

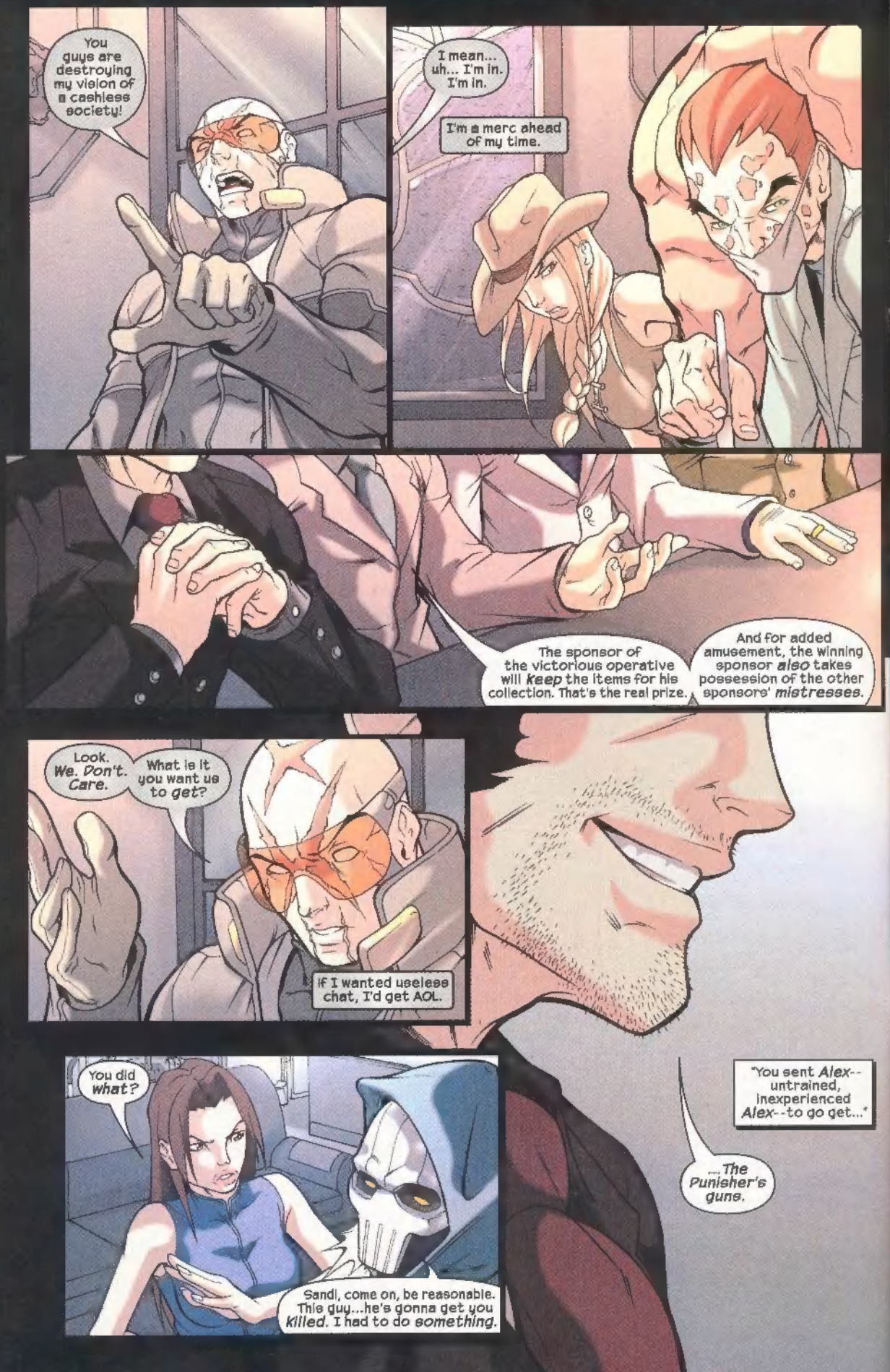

And my name is Alex Hayden. I keep thinking, if I repeat that enough times, I'll start to know why I picked it.
You guys aren't seeing this right.
I mean, I'm looking right at it...

ALPINE PARK
...And it's the most beautiful thing I've ever *seen*.
TICKETS
I'm the only guy I know whose autobiography is three sentences long:
I showed up on Sandi's doorstep.
I don't know who I am or how I got there.
And I don't *care*.
But this...this *feels* like something. Something *great*.


Our first job, Sandi, and we get *this* as payment.
Just *look* at it! Wonder if he left the animals?
I feel like a kid in a candy store that has nudie magazines and illegal fireworks... or, you know, skip the candy store part, really.
I don't know, Alex. The whole place looks pretty run-down and...uh...incredibly, unbelievably *dangerous.*
What are you *talking* about? Come on, let's open it up and ride the coaster! Let's deep-fry us up some corn dogs-- We can all get tattoos and hoot at underage girls!
I swear, some people got no *vision.*
Kenichi Building
"Repeat your last statement to me, Wei-san."
Please Use Side Entrance
It was ...er...it was an insane man riding an elephant, Higashi-sama.
...
I can't imagine it should be very difficult to narrow down the list of suspects in this particular case, Wei.
...No, sir. No.The elephant belongs to a Mr. Paul Steinen, the man who owned the amusement park that we...
That we've been trying to purchase. Understood.
But...but Mr. Steinen has left town, sir.
Then I believe the new owner of that property has made his unwillingness to sell very clear, wouldn't you say?

"Wei-san, please work up a cost analysis for having the park's new owner killed, versus upping our cash offer for the property by 5%. Immediately, please."
Hey, 'Hayden.' You don't have *time* for this. I got you a *gig*.
What? Really?
What *kind* of gig, Tony?
Strictly a no-monkey gig--low risk, high pay. I'd go myself, but tonight's Iron Chef.
I wrote down the directions. You can take my wheels, no sweat.
Huh. Maybe he's not such a jerk, after all. *Damn*, this is a sweet ride.
Your car? Really? What?
Hey, quit acting so shocked! I **want** you to succeed--that's why I'm so hard on you. It's like *tough love*.
God, he's got *all* the Spice Girls CDs, even the *solo* stuff!
Those are *private!*
Alex...you be careful.
If something doesn't feel right, you *leave*.
Yeah, yeah, don't worry, Gramma. Geez, is there no classical?
Fish gotta fly, bird gotta swim.
Hey!
I don't like this--I don't think he's ready.
Big bad merc gotta listen to *Spice Girls*.

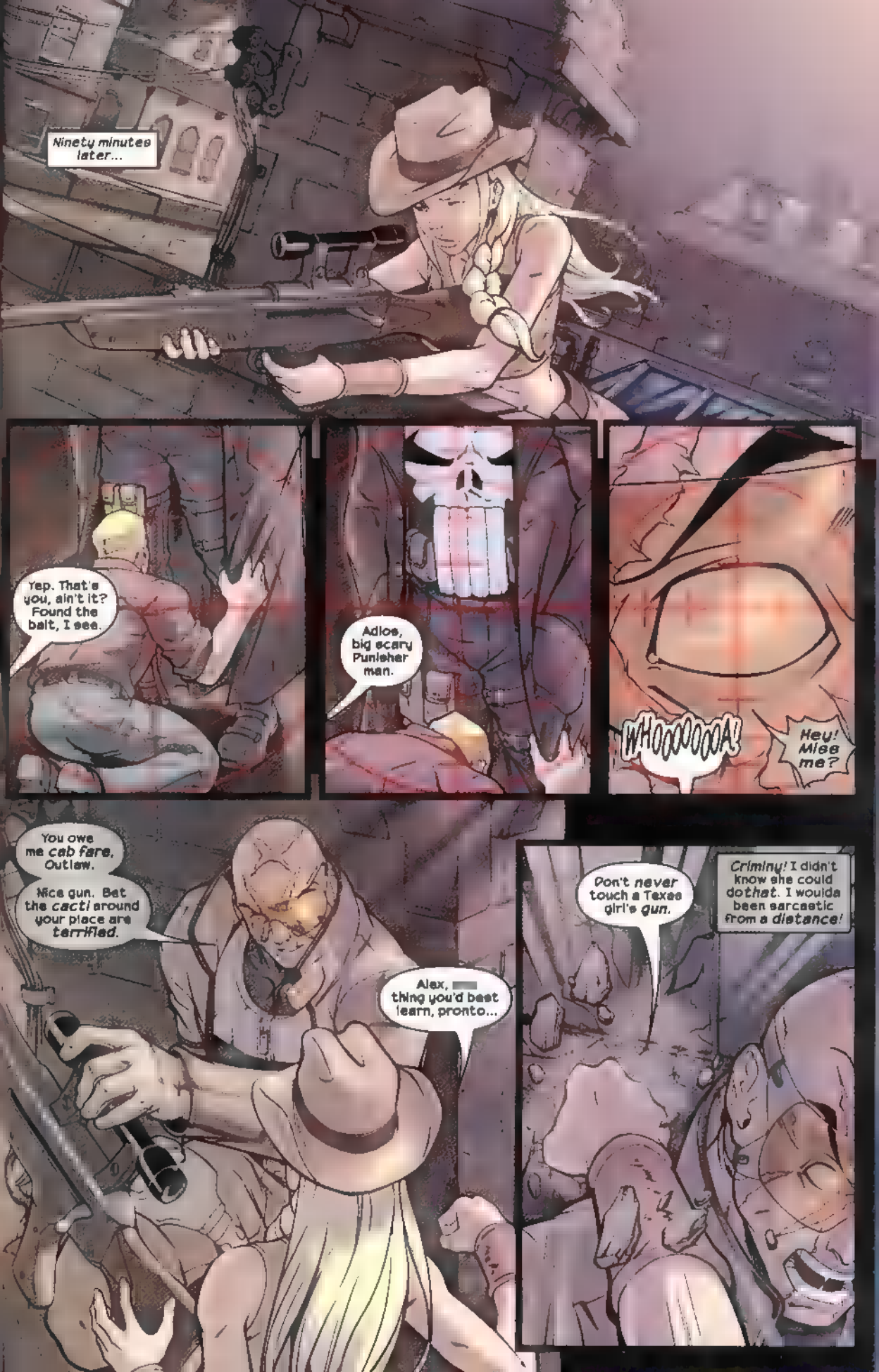
Half an hour later, I'm at my first job that doesn't include monkey wrestling. Hopefully.
"...appreciate the five of you coming in like this. We're interested in offering you a sporting proposition...sort of a scavenger hunt for hired guns."
CULVER SPORT AND GUN CLUB
est. 1887.
Members Only
Each of us has hired each of you to obtain a pair of...unique items. We've each contributed $50,000 as a completion bonus for the merc who returns with the items within 48 hours. With me so far?
$250,000? Roger that.
Met most of these zambonis in the waiting room--hardcore guys, all...
B-1.
B-1, giving a "thumbs up" sign.
The Scalpel.
...just a simple procedure for a reasonable fee...
Bloc.
:mmfda:
And my sometime-pistol-trainer, Outlaw.
Shouldn't we find out what the job is first?

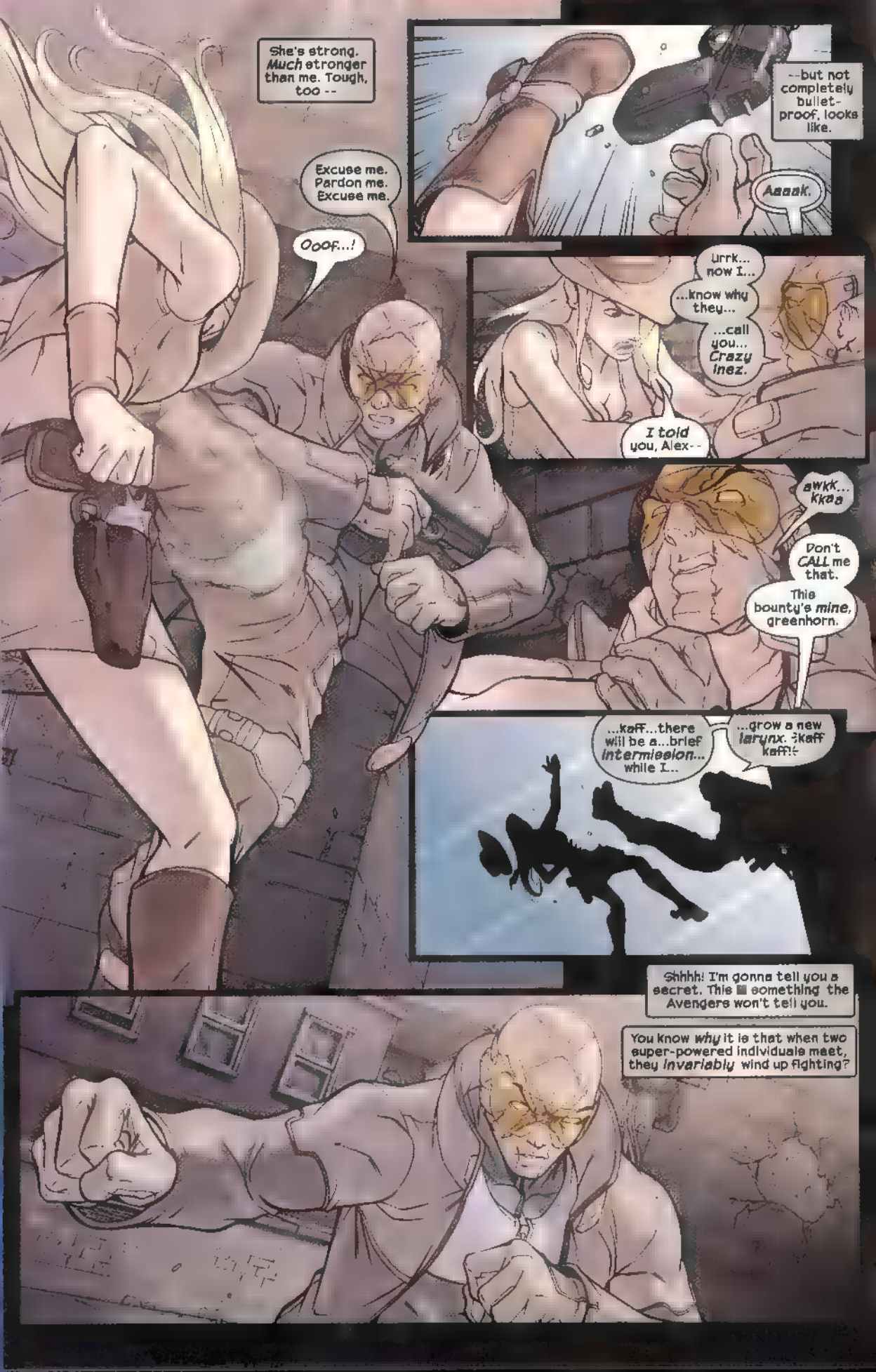

You guys are destroying my vision of a cashless society!
I mean... uh... I'm in. I'm in.
I'm a merc ahead of my time.
The sponsor of the victorious operative will *keep* the items for his collection. That's the real prize.
And for added amusement, the winning sponsor *also* takes possession of the other sponsors' *mistresses*.
Look. *We. Don't. Care.*
What is it you want us to *get*?
If I wanted useless chat, I'd get AOL.
"You sent *Alex*--untrained, inexperienced *Alex*--to go get..."
...*The Punisher's guns.*
You did *what*?
Sandi, come on, be reasonable. This guy...he's gonna get you *killed*. I had to do *something*.

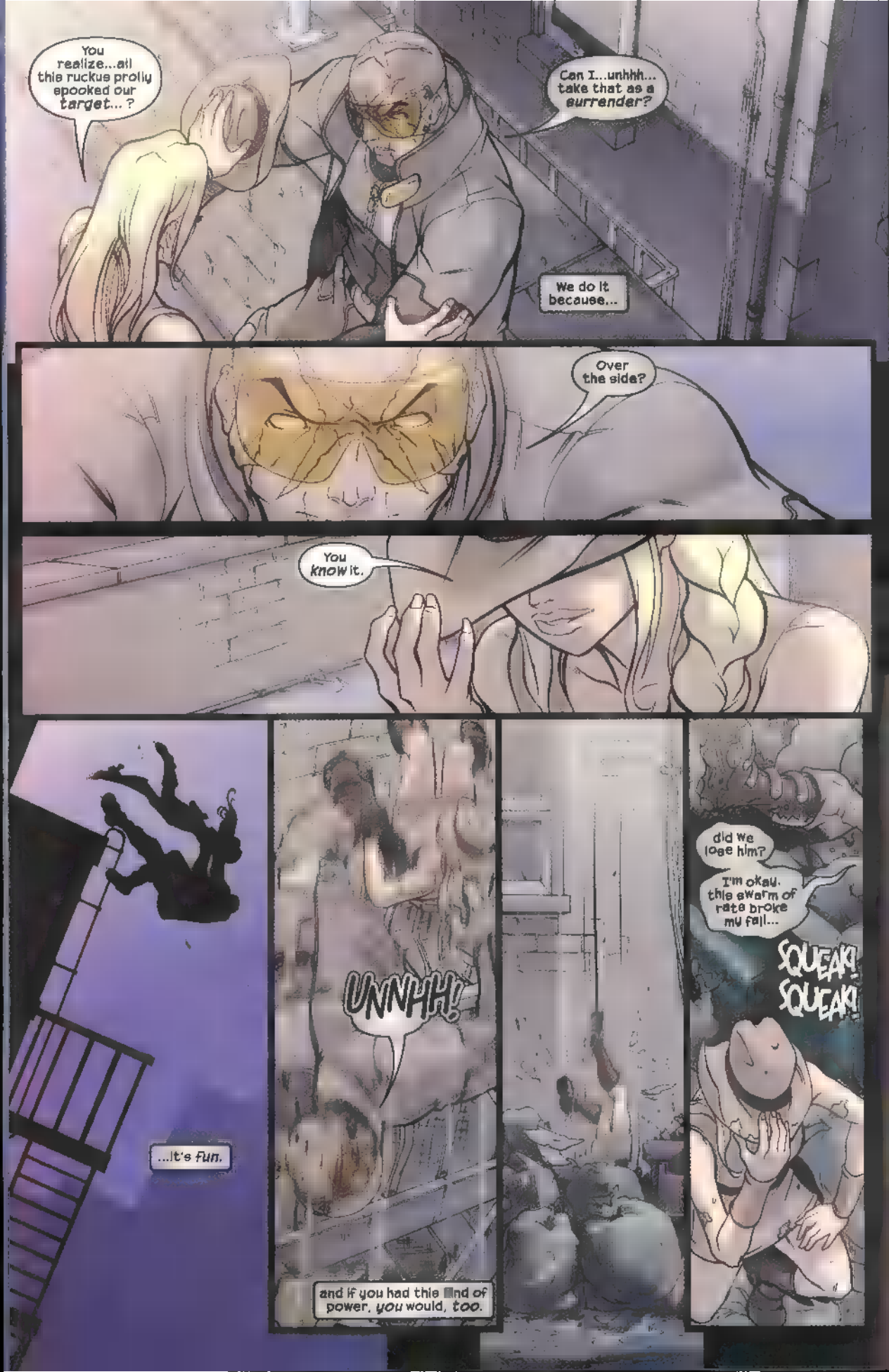
Outlaw shoots [illegible] look...is it protective? A warning? [illegible] threat? Never saw her spooked before.
This Punisher guy must be rough company.
One of you will return with the Punisher's custom .45s and collect the bounty. We have arranged for his current prey to be at the location we have provided you.
We of course expect [illegible] rousing competition from [illegible] of you.
Pity the poor dope they [illegible] as bait.
Meet the objective, nullify the target, return within 48 hours. That's affirmative.
...a routine extraction, and I shall claim the exorbitant fee... heh heh...
Uh...excuse me, when does the competition start?
Well... it begins now, of course. The five of you will ...
Dandy.
...eh...?
KLK
FWWOOOP
....owwwww! Compound fracture of the femur... extensive orthopedic re-construction recommended!
...seek second opinion, best to err on side of caution!
...vision impaired...!
Hey! What [illegible] you doing, Mister?
KRAAKK

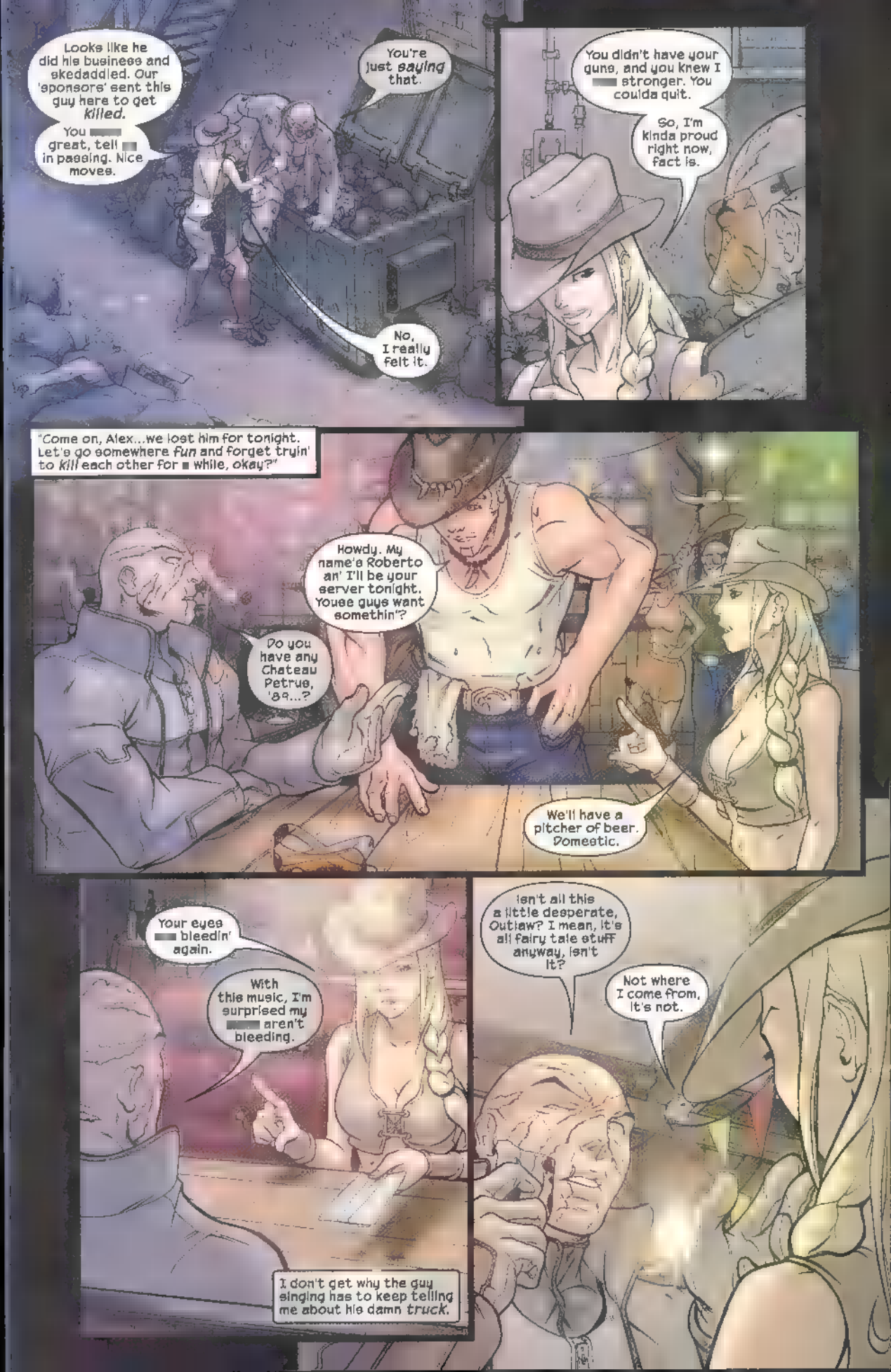
GK!
...multiple contusions caused by accidental fall...
...ow ow ow ow ow OW!
mmmmff heehee.
Very un-American, Mister. I've got a Gulf War surplus rocket with your name on it.
It's not my fault-- I have an impulse control problem! I have a note! I have a note!
Dive, Alex! Dive!
Uh-oh.
mfffffpoop.
...ow my ow! See bone sticking out! OW OW OW! Crying! Crying to mama! Ow ow Owww!
I guess she and I just prefer better odds.

Not fair! They didn't even make it out of the building!
Completely unsporting!
So, what do we do now?
Now? Now we play for real. But if you want some real good advice...
Should be disqualified...
Sorry, but you three are out. Pay your share and leave your mistresses in the main hall, please..
...y can't beat me, and you sure as hell can't beat the Punisher...
...go home, Alex. You ain't ready for this.
The hell I'm not.
...whimper! whine..! cry!
Oh, shut up.
Thanks a dumpload, Outlaw.
Tasky's not gonna be too happy about this.

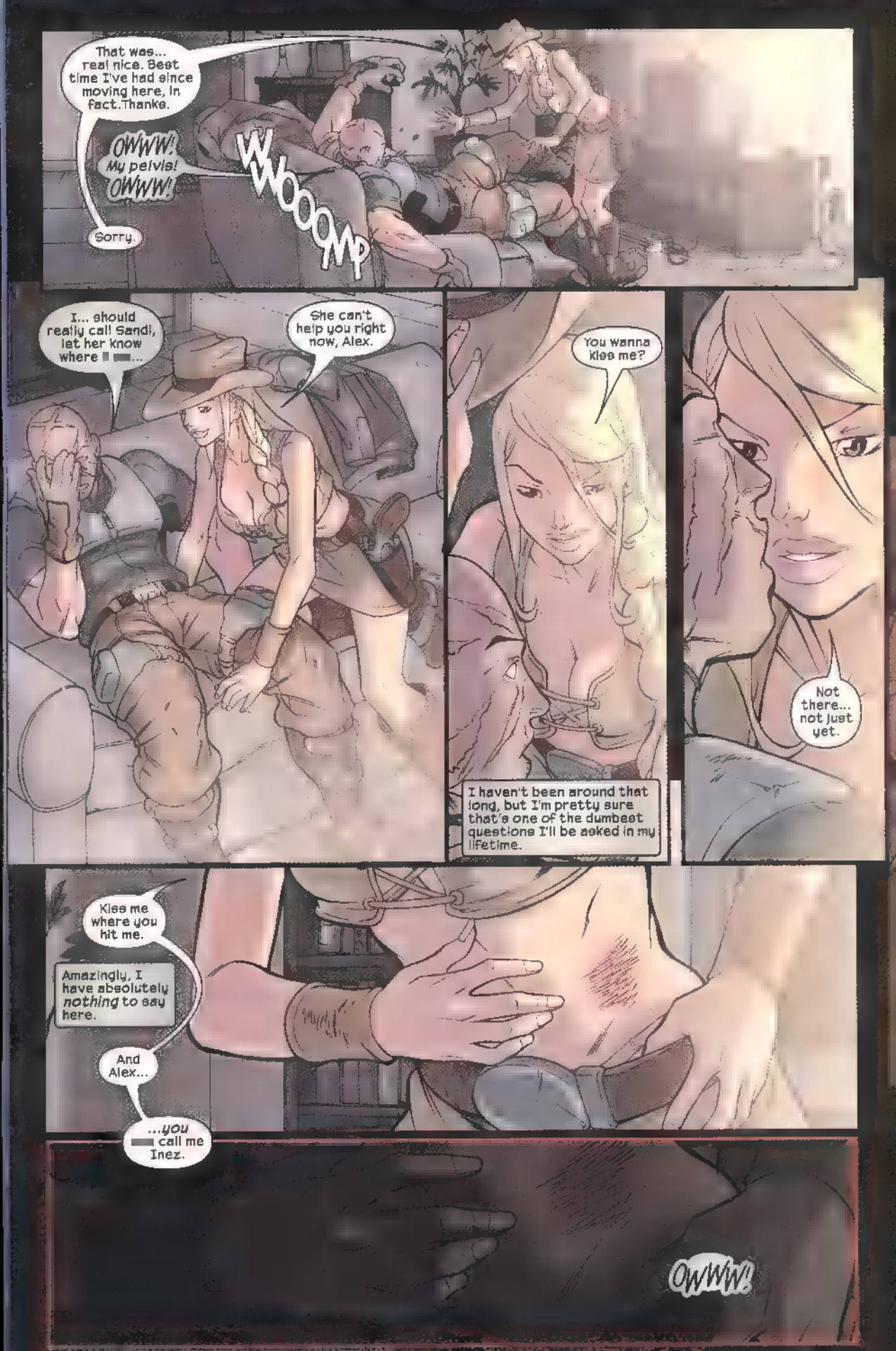

Ninety minutes later...
Yep. That's you, ain't it? Found the bait, I see.
Adios, big scary Punisher man.
WHOOOOOOA!
Hey! Miss me?
You owe me cab fare, Outlaw.
Nice gun. Bet the cacti around your place are terrified.
Alex, thing you'd best learn, pronto...
Don't never touch a Texas girl's gun.
Criminy! I didn't know she could do that. I woulda been sarcastic from a distance!


She's strong. *Much* stronger than me. Tough, too --
Excuse me. Pardon me. Excuse me.
OOOF...!
--but not completely bullet-proof, looks like.
Aaaak.
Urrk... now I...
...know why they...
...call you... *Crazy Inez.*
I told you, Alex--
awkk... kkaa
Don't *CALL* me that.
This bounty's *mine*, greenhorn.
...kaff...there will be a...brief *intermission*... while I...
...grow a new *larynx*. :kaff kaff!:
Shhhh! I'm gonna tell you a secret. This ■ something the Avengers won't tell you.
You know *why* it is that when two super-powered individuals meet, they *invariably* wind up fighting?


You realize...all this ruckus prolly spooked our target...?
Can I...unhhh... take that as a surrender?
We do it because...
Over the side?
You know it.
...It's fun.
UNNHH!
and if you had this kind of power, you would, too.
did we lose him?
I'm okay. this swarm of rats broke my fall...
SQUEAK! SQUEAK!


Looks like he did his business and skedaddled. Our 'sponsors' sent this guy here to get *killed.*
You ▬ great, tell ▬ in passing. Nice moves.
You're just *saying* that.
No, I really felt it.
You didn't have your guns, and you knew I ▬ stronger. You coulda quit.
So, I'm kinda proud right now, fact is.
"Come on, Alex...we lost him for tonight. Let's go somewhere *fun* and forget tryin' to *kill* each other for ■ while, okay?"
Howdy. My name's Roberto an' I'll be your server tonight. Youse guys want somethin'?
Do you have any Chateau Petrus, '89...?
We'll have a pitcher of beer. Domestic.
Your eyes ▬ bleedin' again.
With this music, I'm surprised my ▬ aren't bleeding.
I don't get why the guy singing has to keep telling me about his damn *truck.*
Isn't all this a little desperate, Outlaw? I mean, it's all fairy tale stuff anyway, isn't it?
Not where I come from, it's not.

I know this [redacted] silly. Most of these boys ain't never been out of the city, let alone been in the saddle.
But comin' here makes me a little less lonesome for home.
Well then, ma'am... I believe it's my [redacted] duty [redacted] a genuine pretend-for-one-night cowboy to show you [redacted] good time, Texas-style.
I can see this is gonna take a *lot* of beer.
Oh, I *love* this song!
It sounds like one of the Judds they don't let out of the basement.
I fractured my pelvis on the mechanical bull. Heh. It hurts [redacted] bad. Heh.
Heh. "Judd." Heh. "Pelvis." Heh.
C'mon, big fella...you can... sober up at my apartment.
I've got spurrssesthat pringle dangle mingle...!


That was... real nice. Best time I've had since moving here, in fact. Thanks.
OWWW! My pelvis! OWWW!
WOOOMP
Sorry.
I... should really call Sandi, let her know where [redacted]...
She can't help you right now, Alex.
You wanna kiss me?
I haven't been around that long, but I'm pretty sure that's one of the dumbest questions I'll be asked in my lifetime.
Not there... not just yet.
Kiss me where you hit me.
Amazingly, I have absolutely *nothing* to say here.
And Alex...
...you [redacted] call me Inez.
OWWW!

mrrph...
...nice doggie. go away now. merc need sleepy.
Funny. I don't remember a d...
AAAUAUUUGHH!
Alex, what...?
AAAUAUUUGHH!
AAAUAUUUGHH!
Alex! It's just a wig! I'm okay!
A wig?
Are... are those real?
Well...hate to tell you this, cowboy, but...
AAAUAUUUGHH!

What, ■ you just reckon they grew all of us out ■ a perfect body farm somewhere?

Well, I just naturally *assumed*...

Let me guess, you never been drunk before, right?

EARTH

Now that there's ■ *Texas* breakfast. Made the salsa myself.

Never been drunk before. I've never done *anything* before.

Yeah, I about figured that out last night.

What?

Nothing!

Oh, *MAN*, this is good. >snarf chomp smack<

That's what I like. A man who eats like a pig and sleeps like ■ horse.

Ready to go claim them guns, barnyard boy?

What? But...how?

I called around. I got ■ lead on where the big man's hidin'. Apt to be a good bit dangerous.

We're going. You gonna wear that big she-toupee?

Like *you* should talk. You look like you got run over by a waffle iron. But I'm startin' to take ■ shine to you, anyways.

Well, then let's go get those pistols and be the most dangerous freaks at the ball, what do you say?

That's it... he's leaving his apartment.

Simple smash and grab, and get out before the big bad Punisher even knows we're *there*. I don't know why ■■ didn't think of this *before*.

Careful, Alex-- that there door's more'n likely...
...booby-trapped.
Several deadly booby traps later...
Well, dang. He's got every kinda weapon in here short of a set of Ginsu knives--
--But no .45s.
Hey, there's a loose board in here...
Come on, come on...daddy needs a place to keep his elephant.
Any automatics at all?
Found the ammo-- semijacketed high velocity-- most destructive load a .45'll take.
No .45s, though.

Looking for these?

Uh, oops! Wrong room!
Our Father, who art in Heaven...
Don't shoot me. I have a broken *pelvis*.
I'm the local fire marshal, where are the exits, please?
...may have *already won* 20 million dollars...
I'm not *worth* killing. I *suck*!
I'm a bleeder, and this is such a nice carpet--
If you let me go, I'll be your friend forever!
Gee, but you're handsome. Do you like country music?
Would you like to change your long distance service? And spare my life?
It wasn't *my* idea!!!
Bury me with my spurs on, s'all I ask.
Look, we just came for your .45s. Some rich nutbars offered us a *big smelly wad of dollars* for 'em.
...
How *many* dollars?

Oh, thank God, Alex--I'm so *relieved!* When you didn't come home last night, or call...
Ask him if my car's all right.
What? The Punisher collected the bounty *himself?*
Tell him he better not have damaged my car...
purrr purrr
Of course I can come and pick you both up.
Why does he need a *ride?* Where's my *car,* dammit?!?
Mrroowwrrr!
Could you maybe bring us both some *clothes?*
You're a real *fun date,* Alex, you know that?
TELEPHONE
Yeah, this is sort of embarrassing, but he stole Outlaw's *car* to go get the bounty *himself.*
That's not *all* he stole, the big *jerk!*
Yeah, and one more thing, Sandi.

Hey, don't blame me. I'm not the one who gave the Punisher the car keys.
Wonder how he's gonna feel knowing those gun club guys set him up to be shot at?
YORE CHEE-TIN' HEART... WILL MAKE YOU WEEP...
You think he'll really give them his guns?
YOU'LL CRY AND CRY...
AND TRY TO SLEEP...
CULVER SPORT AND GUN CLUB
est. 1887.
Members Only
BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!
CULVER SPORT AND GUN CLUB
est. 1887.
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Next Issue: XOXOXOXOX!
Who is MARY ZERO?